United Nations A/52/PV.1

General Assembly
Fifty-second Session

Official Records

1st plenary meeting
Tuesday, 16 September 1997, 3 p.m.
New York

Temporary President: Mr. Razali Ismail ..... (Malaysia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

Opening of the session by the Chairman of the delegation of Malaysia

The Temporary President: I declare open the fifty-second session of the General Assembly.

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The Temporary President: Before calling on representatives to observe a minute of silent prayer or meditation in accordance with rule 62 of the rules of procedure, I propose that as we do so we also observe the International Day of Peace, on this third Tuesday of September, as proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolution 36/67 of 30 November 1981, to be devoted to commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace both within and among all nations and peoples.

I now invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Item 122 of the provisional agenda

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/52/350)

The Temporary President: Before turning to the next item on our agenda, I should like, in keeping with the established practice, to invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/52/350, which has been circulated in the General Assembly Hall this afternoon. It contains a letter addressed to me by the Secretary-General in which he informs the Assembly that 12 Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

I should like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter,

> "A Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years."

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

97-85978 (E)

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Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Credentials of representatives to the fifty-second session of the General Assembly

(a) Appointment of the members of the Credentials Committee

The Temporary President: Rule 28 of the rules of procedure provides that the General Assembly at the beginning of each session shall appoint, on the proposal of the President, a Credentials Committee consisting of nine members.

Accordingly, it is proposed that, for the fifty-second session, the Credentials Committee should consist of the following Member States: Argentina, Barbados, Bhutan, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Norway, the Russian Federation, the United States of America and Zambia.

May I take it that the States I have mentioned are hereby appointed members of the Credentials Committee?

It was so decided.

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

Election of the President of the General Assembly

The Temporary President: I now invite members of the General Assembly to proceed to the election of the President of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly.

May I recall that, in accordance with paragraph 1 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 33/138, the President of the General Assembly at the fifty-second session should be elected from among the Eastern European States.

In this connection, I have been informed by the Chairman of the Group of Eastern European States that the Group has endorsed the candidacy of His Excellency Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko of Ukraine for the presidency of the General Assembly.

Taking into account the provisions of paragraph 16 of annex VI to the rules of procedure, I therefore declare His Excellency Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko of Ukraine elected President of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session by acclamation.

I extend my sincere congratulations to His Excellency Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, and I invite him to assume the presidency.

I request the Chief of Protocol to escort the President to the podium.

Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko took the Chair.

Address by Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, President of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session

The President: It is a great honour and privilege for me to be elected President of the General Assembly of the United Nations. I am very grateful for the support for my candidature by the Member States and, in particular, by members of the regional Group of Eastern European countries. I take it, first and foremost, as a high recognition of the active role which my country, Ukraine, plays in the United Nations and in world affairs.

I wish to extend special thanks to my predecessor, Ambassador Razali Ismail of Malaysia, for his outstanding contribution to strengthening the role of the General Assembly during his presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-first session. I would also like to applaud the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, whose brave efforts aimed at reforming this Organization deserve not only words of praise, but, most importantly, actions and support.

It is symbolic that a representative of a renewed democracy which is living through a period of fundamental social, economic and political reforms, has become President of the General Assembly at a time when the issue of United Nations reform tops its agenda. I believe that the experience both of a long tradition of participation by my country in the activities of the United Nations and of reform currently under way in Ukraine will facilitate this presidency's contribution to the work of the General Assembly. I will rely on the understanding, advice and support of members in my efforts to steer the General Assembly in the direction we are all striving for.

Since proclaiming independence in 1991, Ukraine has succeeded in finding and securing its place on the political map of the world and has already proved to be a visible factor in regional stability and security. By eliminating the world's third biggest nuclear arms stock, and by recently signing a number of basic bilateral treaties with its neighbours and the charter on special partnership with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization,

Ukraine has made an essential contribution to strengthening European and world security, thus having a concrete input in implementing the lofty goals enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

Ukraine was one of the founding members of the United Nations and has always attached particular importance to the activities of this Organization. Today Ukraine not only joins other States in supporting the course of United Nations reform, but is prepared to spare no effort in building a broad consensus on how best to turn existing proposals into practical deeds. For a number of complex historical reasons, it took decades before my country became a truly independent Member of the United Nations. Now Ukraine looks forward to taking on greater responsibility and to further engaging in the work aimed at comprehensive and effective realization of the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

The process of globalization calls for our common action in practically every field of human endeavour. No nation can feel secure when it acts alone to face and respond to new challenges. In fact, the very notion of international security has undergone serious changes since the end of the cold war. Peace and security are now more threatened by internal civil and ethnic strife, international terrorism and the proliferation of nuclear arms and materials than by the possibility of an inter-State war, not to mention a nuclear war. Recent trends in international relations suggest that these threats will not automatically disappear, and they will therefore require priority attention on the part of the United Nations.

Economic and social problems are fraught with the same universal consequences for all countries. That was the major conclusion drawn from several important world conferences during recent years. Many nations have to cope with increasingly persistent poverty, destructive corruption, violation of human rights, organized crime and illicit drug trafficking. Very often the problems associated with underdevelopment translate into an issue of international security.

The current environmental problems also demand our increased attention. The sustainability of the entire ecosystem is put in question by irresponsible exploitation of nature and mismanagement, which pose a serious threat to our common well-being. The sad illustration of this is the Chernobyl catastrophe. It happened on the territory of my country, where, to quote the Revelation of Saint John the Divine,

> "there fell a great star from heaven...upon the third part of the rivers". (*The Holy Bible, Revelation 8:10*)

Although it occurred more than a decade ago, the Chernobyl star of Wormwood still hovers like a Damoclean sword over the world as a bitter reminder for all of us.

Lately the United Nations has come under heavy criticism, and not all of it is unjustified. Yet, despite all its shortcomings, the United Nations remains a unique and indispensable mechanism for addressing new challenges, for the resolution of problems related to the maintenance of international peace and security, the promotion of sustained economic growth and sustainable development, human rights, justice and international law, disarmament, prevention of crime and combating international terrorism. By definition, the United Nations possesses unique capabilities for establishing agreed international standards and reaching a global consensus on the most pressing issues which affect the common destiny of all mankind.

I do not want to praise the achievements of the Organization. Neither shall I criticize the United Nations for what it has failed to achieve. Criticism should give way to constructive work aimed at reforming the whole United Nations system. This is a tremendous task, but it has to be accomplished if the purposes of the United Nations have a genuine meaning for all Member States. And there seems to be a broad understanding of the major problems and tasks that loom ahead of us. I am convinced that this understanding should facilitate the establishment of a consensus on how to adapt our Organization to the changing international environment.

I believe the philosophy of this presidency should rest on the solid foundation laid by my predecessors. Its guiding principles should be efficiency, transparency and the democratization of this Organization, including its decision-making process. There are two other essential elements, however, that should be added. These are realism and responsibility.

There is no serious obstacle preventing the United Nations from becoming what it should be and what we, its Member States, would like it to be, so that it does not become a historical monument in the midst of a changed and transformed world. In 1945, we created this Organization to unite nations in their aspiration for peace and security. It is now time to reunite the United Nations as we strive for a better and more promising future.

The programme of reform presented by the Secretary-General stands as a sound basis for further deliberations by the General Assembly. This issue will be at the centre of this session, and I intend to support all efforts aimed at facilitating the process of reform and building a broad consensus that would unite Member States in these efforts. In this respect, I believe that particular attention should be given by the General Assembly to deciding on the most appropriate framework for the consideration of the Secretary-General's reform programme.

Among the issues that have received significant support from the Member States is the strengthening of the role of the General Assembly. The time has come for the potential of the General Assembly to be fully discovered and exploited. This issue was thoroughly examined by the Open-ended High-level Working Group of the General Assembly on the Strengthening of the United Nations System. Implementation of its recommendations should start at this session.

As President of the General Assembly, I intend to explore the possibility of finding proper mechanisms for closer coordination and interoperability between such principal organs as the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council and, certainly, the Secretary-General.

The previous years have witnessed a substantial increase in the membership of the United Nations and important changes in international relations. That is why we face a need to enlarge the Security Council in order to enhance its representative character and to review its working methods and other matters related to its functioning to reinforce its transparency, capacity, effectiveness and efficiency. In my opinion, the principles of the sovereign equality of all Member States and of equitable geographic representation, with due account taken of the interests of all regional groups and of the contribution of Members to the maintenance of international peace and security, should guide our work aimed at the reform of the Security Council.

At the same time, it is necessary to avoid situations in which our work on other issues related to United Nations reform becomes hostage to the divergence of views on Security Council enlargement. As President of this General Assembly, I am determined to do everything possible to streamline a constructive discussion on this issue.

Ensuring the United Nations financial viability is an essential condition for the success of its reform. Despite the outstanding attempts undertaken recently in this regard, the problems facing us in the financial sphere are still unresolved.

In my view, the conditions for finding a way out of the precarious financial situation of the United Nations are now taking shape. At our recommendation, the Secretary-General should improve the Organization's management and structure in the course of the implementation of the proposed programme of reform. In its turn, the reform process would be significantly facilitated if agreement on the next scale of assessments could be reached during the course of this year. We must demonstrate political will and a cooperative approach.

We all know what a tremendously difficult job it is to try to repair a vehicle in motion. However, this session cannot afford to suspend the fulfilment of its responsibilities under the United Nations Charter. During the next 12 months, we have to cope with a vast agenda covering a broad range of political, economic, social, disarmament and humanitarian issues, as well as legal, administrative and budgetary ones. We should proceed from the realistic assumption that the strengthening of the United Nations machinery, if successful, will both help us in these endeavours and enhance the willingness of the international community to increase its demand for United Nations services. Hence, focusing on practical issues, the General Assembly should bear in mind the necessity to further re-appraise today's realities in order to define adequate strategies, concepts and procedures in every field of United Nations activities.

Preventive diplomacy has been identified as a priority in the maintenance of international peace and security. Can we assert that the United Nations adequately employs all its instruments and that the allocated resources are sufficient for preventive actions to be successful? If international crime and illegal drug trafficking pose an ever-growing threat to national economies and democratic institutions, which exact part of the responsibility should be assigned to the United Nations so that its contribution to combating these and other evils can bring about desirable results? How should the United Nations address the daunting problems related to the growing numbers of refugees and displaced persons who fall victim to violence?

The acute problems of the least developed countries still remain on the United Nations agenda. What further steps should be taken to prove our intention to resolve them? Are we able and willing to do this? What are the

best possible mechanisms for the United Nations to work in concert with non-governmental organizations in bringing our activities closer to civil society?

This list of questions is not even close to exhaustive. However, addressing all of them and getting the expected answers, no matter how complex they may appear, would to a large extent determine the effectiveness of United Nations reform, if we are guided by realism and responsibility in its implementation.

I am convinced that all of us have our own views on these issues. Let us share them and try to find a common denominator. I should like to use this occasion to remind all the Member States that the success of reform now depends on their political wisdom and their will to act promptly, constructively and decisively.

This session of the General Assembly has all the prerequisites to become a watershed session. During the upcoming months, we have a chance to revitalize this universal Organization and make it more fit to meet the mounting challenges.

I strongly believe that we have enough power to make this session a turning point marking the beginning of a new era in the history of this Organization. The famous French moralist La Rochefoucauld was right in saying that sometimes we have more power than will and that very often we consider things impossible in order to excuse ourselves for not acting in accordance with our abilities.

As President of the General Assembly, I shall encourage action-oriented discussion on the measures and proposals that encompass the reform of the United Nations system. As a diplomat — and a colleague — who has devoted a large part of his professional career to working with the United Nations, I should like to be a witness to a visible landmark in the history of this Organization.

Many years ago, speaking figuratively about the hard work of those who choose the road of change, the outstanding Ukrainian poet Ivan Franko said:

(spoke in Ukrainian)

> "Break down this rock! Let neither weariness, nor weather, nor thirst, nor hunger hold you back from this endeavour."

(spoke in English)

I therefore invite all of us to do hard and dedicated work. We will succeed if we join together.

The meeting rose at 3.30 p.m.